

ENROLL IN LIBERTY GIRLS HOOPS CAMP

The Liberty High girls basketball camp is July 26-29 from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. at LHS. The camp is for girls grades 1-9 and costs \$85. For info, contact coach Marc Costanzo at marc.costanzo10@icloud.com

SPORTS

Fauquier Times | July 14, 2021

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SOPHIA SPYTEK, GRAHAM ZONTINE NAMED 2021 FAUQUIER TIMES WAKEFIELD ATHLETES OF THE YEAR

Sophia played soccer, field hockey, swam, rode horses

Zontine: Scrappy three-sport star became Owls' X-factor

By Billy Marin
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Participation is a Spytek family trait.

During her time at Wakefield School, Sophia Spytek experimented with different sports. She played on the varsity soccer team, her first sporting love. She also picked up field hockey in middle school, and played on that varsity team, too. Her sophomore year, she signed up for the swim team seemingly on a whim "because the school offered it."

"Sophia is the kind of person who loves to try things. She values competition and chases whatever challenge is in front of her," said Stephanie Spytek, Sophia's mother.

The spirit of challenging herself in new sports helped make Spytek 2021 *Fauquier Times* Wakefield School Girls Athlete of the Year.

Spytek has been playing soccer since she was 5. She's a versatile player who fit anywhere Wakefield soccer coach Grant Massey chose to deploy her.

"She can play anywhere. She starts at center back, but I can move her into the midfield too or as a forward if we need a goal," said Massey.

When Spytek was 12, she moved from Boston, Massachusetts, to The Plains. That move allowed her to look into a previously unexplored interest: horseback riding. "It was always a dream to have a horse, so when we moved here it just kind of happened," she said.



PHOTO BY BENJAMIN MASON

A lifelong soccer player always "game" to try new sports, Sophia Spytek is 2021 *Fauquier Times* Wakefield School Girls Athlete of the Year. She'll study at the College of William & Mary and perhaps pursue a career in medicine, like her mom.

She had always wanted to ride, so when Spytek found herself in the middle of horse country, she knew she had to take advantage of the opportunity given. She started riding with her mother. She rode seriously at local competitions, as well as for the Wakefield team.

While she never saw herself as an intense rider, she threw herself into it and made sure to enjoy the competition. Spytek saw an opportunity and she did not let it go to waste.

See **SPYTEK**, page 21

By Jason S. Rufner
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Graham Zontine never could stand still.

Maybe that's why his parents Matthew and Susan enrolled him in soccer, basketball and the local swim team by age 6.

And maybe that's why Graham, a Wakefield School student since before kindergarten, has been a versatile multi-sport athlete for the majority of his life.

Zontine is the 2021 *Fauquier Times* Wakefield School after a versatile career that brought him a host of varsity letters in soccer, basketball and lacrosse.

It's no mistake that his sports of choice happen to be ones where he'd get to run around all the time. "My parents always wanted us to be active," he said. "I was always the kid who wouldn't stop running."

Growing up the fourth of five, the need to compete was a part of Zontine's life.

"Whether it is a pick-up basketball game in the driveway or our football games in the front yard," dad Matthew said, "Graham, as one of the youngest, had to learn to keep up at a young age."

Competing mainly against brother Jakob, four years Graham's elder, he developed a tenacity and scrappiness and the nickname "X-Factor" from one of his coaches.



PHOTO BY BENJAMIN MASON

"I was always the kid who wouldn't stop running," says Graham Zontine. The 2021 *Fauquier Times* Wakefield School Boys Athlete of the Year excelled in lacrosse and soccer and threw his skills into basketball. He'll attend James Madison University this fall.

First kicks on the soccer pitch

Soccer was Graham's first sport and one he still favors.

He loves the rush when a corner kick comes flying in, and he and his teammates desperately try to knock it away. "Other sports, sometimes you're doing nothing, but in soccer, it's pretty active for everyone. So my parents thought that'd be a good sport to start with," he said.

See **ZONTINE**, page 20

THE ZONTINE FILE

-Family: Father Matthew is an English teacher at Wakefield. Mother Susan is a nurse practitioner for Valley Health. Sister Hannah, 25, is a computer scientist who recently got married. Brother Jakob, 23, is about to graduate from George Mason University. Sister Catherine, 21, is a rising senior at the University of Virginia. Brother Eliot, 14, is a rising freshman at Wakefield.

-Name game: His last name is pronounced Zahn-teen.

-Nicknames: Graham-bo, X-Factor, Grahamathan.

-Hometown: Winchester.

-Favorite sport: Lacrosse to play, football to watch.

-Favorite pro team: Pittsburgh Steelers.

-Favorite pro athlete: Heinz Ward.

-Number: 7 (but wears 10 for basketball)

-Favorite food: Tater tots.

-Favorite fast food: Chipotle steak bowl.

-Favorite movie: Moonrise Kingdom.

-College choice: Will attend James Madison University with interests in computer science or sports journalism.

THE SPYTEK FILE

-Family: Father Joseph Spytek works in satellite communications for Speedcast, mother Stephanie is an obstetrician-gynecologist with a practice in Gainesville. She has three younger siblings, all at Wakefield. Sydney is a rising junior. Joseph is going into eighth grade and Saylor into fifth grade.

-Numbers game: Wore No. 22, or No. 8 when she can't wear 22.

-Favorite food: Spaghetti Bolognese.

-Favorite restaurant: Five Guys.

-Did you know? Sophia spent three months living in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, where her mom worked as a global health doctor.

-Favorite actor: Chris Pine.

-College choice: Will attend William & Mary.

-Possible career: Doctor or veterinarian. With mom Stephanie a medical doctor, Sophia has been visiting the hospital and watching surgeries or C-sections since she was a teenager. She lives on a farm in The Plains surrounded by animals often needing medical attention.

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ZONTINE, from page 19

He's played soccer every year since age 5, except for his sophomore year at Wakefield.

"I skipped soccer in 10th grade, and looking back, I regret that," he said. "When I came back in 11th grade, it was an incredible experience."

With Zontine among the midfielder corps, the Fighting Owls made Delaney Athletic Conference finals and the second round of the VISAA state tournament in his junior year.

Though not normally a starter, Zontine played most of the first half and all of the second half in that state tourney contest. "I really thought that was enjoyable," he said. "That was a great experience with a lot of great people."

Point guard in hoops

Zontine also started in basketball.

"I've never had the best technique, but I've stuck to basketball and worked to improve," he said.

After coming off the bench as a freshman on JV, Zontine grew into the starting point guard role as a sophomore. Making the varsity as a junior, he earned the starter's role at the shooting guard spot.

"That was one of my favorite seasons," he said. "I started to score more points and having a lot more fun."

But it was Zontine's tenacious defense that earned him the sobriquet "X-Factor."

"Before a couple big games, my coach [Al Ford] would point to me and say that I was the X-Factor," Zontine said. "He meant that if I could play a good game, get some steals, put up some points, get some assists, then we'd be able to win."

The Owls nearly won a DAC tourney game against a higher-seeded opponent, making a bittersweet memory for Zontine. "We were playing Tandem Friends, and they'd already beaten us twice," he recalled. "We didn't expect to be able to win. They had more size and more seniors. We didn't have any seniors at all."

Tied 51-51 with mere seconds remaining, a 3-pointer sunk Wakefield's hopes of an upset. The loss stung, but Zontine found solace. "I think I really impacted the score in that game. I really felt good about my performance," he said.

Lacrosse it is

The rule at Wakefield is for middle-school students to choose three sports. Zontine chose tennis, but was open to adventures with a webbed stick. "In seventh grade my friend Harrison convinced me to join the lacrosse team," Zontine said. "I instantly just loved it."

It became his best sport. Zontine knew next to nothing about lacrosse, but became a force by eighth grade. "I started scoring more and getting a bigger role on the team," he said.

As a freshman midfielder, Zontine

led the Owls in goals and earned the team's Most Valuable Player award. "I distinctly remember a couple juniors and seniors weren't happy that a freshman won the MVP award, but, I mean, I deserved it," he said.

With a couple six-goal games to his credit, Zontine provided more than an offensive threat. He was adept at picking up ground balls and clearing the zone with his feet.

"I was pretty good at cradling and getting the ball out," he said. "I remember a game in tenth grade against Trinity Christian. I got the ball and three people were just whacking me left and right. To this day I don't know how I held on to the ball, but I somehow weaseled out of it and got across the line."

Zontine's also had the winning goal in an 11-10 overtime win over Trinity Christian.

"It was intense. One of our defenders put a clean hit on one of their players and injured him, so they were mad at us. They were trying to hit us hard," Zontine recalled.

Zontine cleared the ball and the Owls set up in their offensive zone. The ball came back to Zontine. "I tell myself, I'm not passing this ball, I'm just going to shoot it," he said.

From the left of the goal mouth, Zontine made a cut to the right. An aggressive defender launched himself at Zontine, going for a check. "He tried to go overtop of me and get my stick from behind, but I moved it out of the way and got an open goal."

Zontine flung the ball into the empty portion of the net, giving the Owls a satisfy-

ing victory.

"That was the first game of our undefeated season," he said proudly. "We only played three games, but still undefeated."

My father, my teacher

Matthew Zontine taught Graham in a senior-level Literature and Composition class at Wakefield this past year. "He tells these stories in class that I've already heard, like how he and my mom met in Peru when they almost got robbed," said Zontine. "So it's funny to see my classmates hear them for the first time."

For his senior thesis, Zontine designed a 38-page magazine covering the films of director Wes Anderson. "That took a lot of long nights, but I'm happy with how it turned out," he said. He got an A- in Dad's class.

Zontine will enroll at James Madison University and is thinking about following in sister Hannah's footsteps and studying computer science, with sports journalism also on his mind. His sports fix will come with intramural basketball and club lacrosse.

He'll also keep a close eye on younger brother Eliot, a rising Wakefield freshman who plays all the same sports Graham did. "I need to make sure he keeps up the Zontine athletic name," Graham said.



JV FIELD HOCKEY OPEN TO 8TH GRADERS

Rising 8th grade girls in Fauquier County can play JV field hockey this fall at their designated high school. Practices begin Aug. 2. Check with the school.

FHS VOLLEYBALL TRYOUTS

Fauquier High girls volleyball tryouts are Aug. 2-3 from 3-5:30 p.m. both days. A VHSL physical must be completed and dated after May 1, 2021.

SPORTS

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NIA ROGERS, JOEY SHULL NAMED 2021 FAUQUIER TIMES KETTLE RUN ATHLETES OF THE YEAR

Nice work, Nia: Rogers won state title with clutch throw

By Fred Hodge

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

We've all seen athletes jump for joy, drop to their knees in disbelief or even cry upon achieving a much desired victory.

But not always.

Take Kettle Run track and field star Nia Rogers.

When the time arrived to take her place atop the medal stand after pulling out a huge win to capture the Class 4 state shot put title on June 19, Rogers felt controlled and satisfied but not demonstrative.

"To be honest, nothing," Rogers recalled. "I didn't say anything. I felt just like (the award) was first place at a (large invitational) meet."

A career-best and school-record throw of 39 feet, seven inches capped her outstanding career as a track and volleyball star and helped cement her selection as the 2021 *Fauquier Times* Kettle Run Girls Athlete of the Year.

Rogers said the satisfaction of her state title was still enjoyable. She drew publicity when a prominent photo of her appeared on the front page of the *Fauquier Times* with news of her state title.

"Oh, I really am the state champion. People can see this is a big thing and what I can do," Rogers said. "It hit me after days of not feeling anything."

Mining gold

Rogers needed to overcome a bout of self-doubt earlier that day as the event unfolded.

"I felt pressure and nervousness. It was more psyching myself out, thinking 'Oh, I can't do this,'" the Cougar said. "I tried to keep my head level."

Rogers said she did not keep track



COURTESY PHOTO

Nia Rogers came up big to win the Class 4 state shot put title, recording a throw of 39 feet seven inches to pass six other competitors and prevail. She was also a middle blocker on Kettle Run's successful volleyball team. The 2021 *Fauquier Times* Kettle Run Girls Athlete of the Year will attend Virginia-Wise.

of the other contestants' throws in either the preliminary round or in the finals, choosing to concentrate on herself not looking at any of the other contestant distances.

Each girl had three throws in the preliminary round, with the top nine girls advancing to the final round. Rogers, the event's No. 3 seed, found herself comfortably in seventh place after two throws of 34-11.25, but she felt her technique was awry.

"After that second throw, I went straight to [throwing coach Will Yancey] and asked 'What am I doing wrong,'" Rogers said.

"Normally, she is very quiet at a meet," Yancey said. "Nia asked me not to say anything during the meet... just let her throw. After her first two throws, she changed her mind and came over to ask for advice. I just reminded her that she knew exactly what to do."

See **ROGERS**, page 24

Shull shined on lacrosse field, hoops court and the links

By Jason S. Rufner

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

For a guy who filled his seasons playing lacrosse, basketball and golf for Kettle Run High School, Joey Shull's first sports love was football.

He was a five-year-old kid in Frederick, Md., when he first set foot on a pee-wee football field.

"I grew up playing football, at running back, and I remember I was pretty good," said Shull, who earned honors as 2021 *Fauquier Times* Kettle Run Boys Athlete of the Year.

At Kettle Run, golf filled his high school autumns. By his senior year the sturdy 6-foot-1, 187-pounder was ready to succumb to the lures of the gridiron. That's right, the Cougars' No. 2 golfer planned to opt out of his final season of golf in favor of Friday night lights before his plans were interrupted.

"I was actually on the football team, and I wound up getting COVID," he said. "I had to miss two weeks, and it was when we were learning all the new plays. I sat on my couch trying to learn about 600 plays, but I just couldn't do it. So I just played golf."

Ironically, both the Kettle Run football and golf teams went on to win Northwestern District titles.

Of his near-miss football experience?

"I think it was God telling me to



PHOTO BY KIRSTEN GEORGI

Joey Shull nearly added football to the resume of sports he excelled. Although a case of COVID helped end that, the 2021 *Fauquier Times* Kettle Run Boys Athlete of the Year still had a monster senior year that included an all-region selection in lacrosse, a district championship in golf, and starting role in basketball.

stick with golf, I guess," joked Shull, who's contributed to multiple Kettle Run golf titles. "But it was a great senior year. I enjoyed every minute of it."

The Zen of golf

Shull was 8 when his dad, Joseph II, took him out on a course for the first time to pass along a love of the game.

The youngster took a liking to the challenging individualized sport.

"I could see how playing golf benefited me in dealing with situations in life," Shull said. "It really taught me patience."

See **SHULL**, page 24

THE JOEY SHULL FILE

-Family: Father Joe is a manager for The Anderson Company in Manassas; mother Kimberley is a homemaker; older sister Katelyn just graduated from Lynchburg University with a degree in Health Promotions; younger brother Jacob attends Warrenton Middle School and plays lacrosse, basketball and football.

-Pronunciation guide: Shull rhymes with Hull.

-Hometown: Warrenton after moving from Frederick, Md., when he was 11.

-Favorite sport to play: Lacrosse.

-Favorite sport to watch: College football

-Favorite college football team: Oregon.

-Favorite pro team: Washington Football Team.

-Favorite pro athlete: Paul George.

-Numbers game: Wore No. 3.

-Favorite food: Wings with buffalo sauce.

-Favorite wing place: California Chicken Wings in Manassas.

-Favorite fast food: Chipotle

-Favorite movie: "Fast & Furious 7."

-Favorite vacation spot: Corolla, Outer Banks.

-Future college: West Virginia University.

-Major: Sports Management.

THE NIA ROGERS FILE

-Family: Parents Rodney Rogers, who works in independent sales and delivery, and Jatoris Rogers, a homemaker, volunteer and college student. Sister Natasha Rogers is Corporal in United States Army stationed at Fort Stewart-Hunter Army Airfield (Ga.), brother Rodney Rogers II is a rising 8th grader Warrenton Middle School.

-Favorite food: Steak quesadilla, corn, pineapple.

-Favorite TV show: "Family Feud."

-Favorite music: All genres.

-Favorite subject: History.

-Least favorite subject: Math.

-In her free time: Sleeping, eating, working out, listening to music.

-Possible major: Business Administration.

-Possible career: "Public relations manager... because I like organizing events and having total control over them."

Rogers is Cougars' top athlete

ROGERS, from page 21

"He told me 'Use your hips and go for it. You know exactly what you need to do, just go out and do it,'" Rogers remembered.

The result was her gold medal throw, passing the six girls ahead of her, including previous leader Ella Carlson (38-11) from Sherando. Yet, Rogers did not believe she had been successful.

"It felt wrong," she said of her immediate impression while awaiting the measurement. "But in [Yancey's] eyes it was right."

Rogers said she had felt more comfortable on her two subpar throws, while Yancey said the form was off.

"When I threw it wrong in my eyes, it was right," she laughed about the winning toss. Rogers' best effort in the finals was 38-5, the third-best toss of the competition, but no other girl threw more than 37-10 for a comfortable eight-inch final margin over Carlson.

Rogers and Carlson, a junior, had been butting heads during the indoor and outdoor track seasons. Carlson won the Region 4C and state titles indoor, while Rogers was second in the region and third in the state. Carlson won the Northwestern District's shot put and discus competitions outdoor, with Rogers the silver medalist in both events.

Rogers rebounded at the regional meet, winning the shot put gold medal but was sixth in the discus and did not qualify for the state meet. Rogers said she was able to devote all of her time to the shot put, her favorite event.

"She was up and down through the spring," Yancey said. "But showed signs that a big throw was possible when she threw 39 feet at the Apple Blossom Invitational. When she won the regional championship, I think that it gave her the confidence she needed for the state meet."



"It hit me after days of not feeling anything," said Nia Rogers of the delayed euphoria she felt after winning the state title in the shot put.

TIMES STAFF PHOTO/
COY FERRELL

"Nia is always smiling and is loved by her peers. But never let her demeanor fool you. She is a fierce competitor that hates to lose and will give 100% in pursuit of a win."

-KETTLE RUN TRACK COACH MYRAIDA DAVIS

Rogers placed third in the Class 4 state indoor meet earlier in the year to equal her finish as a junior.

Nia, the fierce competitor

The Cougar began track as a freshman but could not complete the season due to a knee ailment. She returned as a sophomore and began experimenting.

"I'd always thought about doing field events. I thought I would be a good jumper because of volleyball, but I realized [those jumps] were more horizontal than vertical," she said.

So throwing events became her specialty. "I was very strong upper body-wise," she said.

"Nia is always smiling and is loved by her peers," coach Myraida Davis said. "But never let her demeanor fool you."

"She is a fierce competitor that hates to lose and will give 100% in pursuit of a win," Davis said. "Her internal motivation and dedication to her teams are skills that I know will serve her well as she embarks on new adventures."

See **ROGERS**, page 25

No rest for Joey: Shull sank birdies, grabbed rebounds, dominated in lacrosse

SHULL, from page 21

He opted for golf over football at his father's behest, and immediately earned a spot in the Cougars' top six.

"I made a big impact on the team my freshman year, and that's when I realized I was pretty good."

He was at or near the top of head coach Dale Edwards' lineup for the next four years.

"Joey wanted to win as bad as anyone and that led him to overachieve," Edwards said. "Being a multi-sport athlete made him embrace the team aspect of our sport even though you are on your own on the course. I am proud to say Joey is one of K-Run's golf family!"

As a senior, Shull took on the role of mentor for some of the younger Cougar players.

"I love being that. I love being a leader and having the younger kids look up to me," he said. "Patience comes into play there too, helping them move on to the next shot."

Shull's fondest memory on the links occurred in the first match of his junior year, when he won his flight with a round of 73 at a prestigious tournament at Shenandoah Valley Country Club.

"Honestly, I had no idea. It was the first tourney of the season and I didn't think I played that well," he said. "But I saw my score and was like, dang."

Some people find it strange that a lacrosse and basketball star excels on the golf course, Shull said.

"Golf is a completely mental game. You have to stay mentally strong," he said. "The others are all about hand-eye coordination and the speed of the game."

Moving into lacrosse

A native of Frederick, Md., Shull moved with his family to Warrenton when he was 11. That's when he was introduced to a new sport.

"They never had lacrosse in Frederick. I didn't even know how to say lacrosse. I didn't even know it was a sport," he said. "So we moved here and I made some new friends, and they all played lacrosse."

The father of one friend was a lacrosse coach, facilitating Shull's entry into the sport.

"Lacrosse has probably done the most for me," he said. "I just love how fast it is."

Shull tallied 41 goals and 25 assists as a Kettle Run senior attackman, leading the team in points and earning first-team all-region honors. As a sophomore, he was part of the Cougars' Class 4 Region B championship while making the second-team all-region list.

"That was definitely my favorite moment, especially because we played against our rival Fauquier for the region championship," Shull recalled. "Everyone grew up playing against each other, so there were a lot of emotions in that game. Once we won, it was an amazing moment."

He provided one of the Cougars' top highlights with a 12-goal game, and even suffered through injury to be in a Kettle Run uniform.

"He loves the game, and it shows. Nothing said this more than playing on a broken leg in the playoffs," said Kettle Run lacrosse coach Bryan Logan. "Joey is the type of guy I wish I had every year, but players like him are truly special and only come around every once in a while. He really was one of the highlights of the year, not just as a player, but as a man."

See **SHULL**, page XX



PHOTO BY RANDY LITZINGER

Joey Shull mastered every sport he tried at Kettle Run, en route to 2021 Athlete of the Year honors. His younger brother Jacob figures to be a Kettle Run athlete in a few years.

In volleyball, Rogers was 'the ultimate team player'

ROGERS, from page 24

Powerful middle blocker

Rogers had high hopes for her final season of Kettle Run. The Cougars had a veteran crew of eight seniors and had their sights set on county rival Fauquier, but a COVID-19 incident ended any chance of the post-season.

After a strong regular season the No. 2-seeded Cougars planned to host No. 3 Handley in the Northwestern District semifinals with a chance to earn a Region 4C berth. Less than three hours before the Handley game, the squad learned that game and the remainder of the season was canceled because a team member tested positive for COVID-19.

"A lot of the girls were crying, but at that point I was more irritated because I was thinking track season would cut short," Rogers said.

"We were expecting to have a solid season, but it got cut short of our hopes."

Rogers prefers volleyball over track because of the camaraderie and the game's quick pace. "Just how the game is played. It's always been team, team, team," she said.

Kettle Run coach Mike Howard called Rogers "the ultimate team player," citing her leadership, athletic ability, work ethic and the friendships she formed.

"This year, I feel that there were some teams that avoided or adjust-

ed to how they set their middles [to avoid Rogers]," said Howard, who coached her as a "raw talent" freshman on JV.

Rogers played a large role for a 23-2 JV squad, moving to the varsity as a junior. Howard said she split time in the middle with two other players, continuing to develop especially offensively and was ready for a big senior season.

Howard noted Rogers not only performed well in games, with some of her bigger contributions coming on the practice floor.

"She made the team better in practice because she was an intimidating presence as a blocker," Howard recalled. "There were times in practice when she would shut down hitters with her blocks."

Off to UVA-Wise

Rogers will attend the University of Virginia at Wise this fall, hoping to study business administration with an eye in the public relations field.

Wise does not offer track squads, although there is cross country, which does not interest her.

"The only time you will see me running is for food or running for my life," Rogers laughed.

Volleyball is also possible, as a walk-on. Rogers also might accept a manager's position if one is available. Intramural play also is a consideration.

Joey loves sports

SHULL, from page 24

Hoops, too

While he took golf and lacrosse seriously, basketball was just something Shull played for fun. He doesn't remember exactly when he started playing organized ball.

By the time he reached middle school, it was another sport to add to his collection.

He played JV hoops as a freshman and sophomore, then was a starting guard on the varsity the next two years, earning the team MVP award as a senior.

Learning that he'd have a basketball season at all was a great moment for Shull. He'd already lost a lacrosse season and a golf season to the pandemic.

"This would probably be my favorite sports moment. Realizing we were going to be able to play this year," he said. "It was so nice to know I was going to be able to be on the court again!"

Sports in his future

Even when he's not playing, Shull still devotes considerable time to sports. He worked for the school newspaper, The Chronicle at Kettle Run, for four years, rising to the role of sports editor.

He even spent a football season as the public address announcer for JV games.

Shull will matriculate at West Virginia University, majoring in sports management. He also plans to try out for the Mountaineers'

"Sports have opened up my life, so after college I want to bring that back to communities so that young kids can learn the importance of sports."

-JOEY SHULL

club lacrosse team.

Joey's ambition

His dream is to run a pro sports franchise, but also fancies the idea of promoting sports to children.

"Sports have opened up my life, so after college I want to bring that back to communities so that young kids can learn the importance of sports."

He's already doing so with his brother Jacob, six years Joey's junior. Jacob is primed to be a multi-sport star too, following Joey in lacrosse and basketball.

"I feel like I have a major role in his sports," Joey said. "He started playing lacrosse because I did. He grew up playing against older kids, so he could be the real athlete of the family."

Can little bro golf?

"Yes, he does golf," Shull said. "But is he good? Um, no."

With his Kettle Run career behind him, Shull reflected on his times playing for the Cougars.

"It was fun, it was amazing, it was a great opportunity," he said. "It's really opened up a lot of doors for me."

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LIBERTY FOOTBALL SCRIMMAGE MOVED

Liberty's football scrimmage at Patriot was moved to Thursday, Aug. 12 at 6 p.m. from Wednesday. On Thursday, Kettle Run hosts Freedom (South Riding) at 7 p.m. On Friday, Fauquier hosts Skyline at 6 p.m.

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ABBY SOLTYS AND ANGELO BRIZZI NAMED 2021 FAUQUIER TIMES HIGHLAND SCHOOL ATHLETES OF THE YEAR

Abby won four state titles, was Hawks' heart and soul

By Billy Marin

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Lacrosse and basketball captain, eight-time all-state selection, four-time state champion, class president, college recruit, volunteer for a teen mental health organization and excellent student.

Is there anything Abby Soltys can't do?

Soltys excelled on the lacrosse field and on the basketball court, earning her honors as 2021 *Fauquier Times* Highland School Girls Athlete of the Year.

Soltys was a five-year starter in basketball and lacrosse, a rarity made possible by Highland's policy of allowing eighth-graders to play on varsity teams. And Soltys didn't just make the roster, which as an eighth-grader would've been impressive enough. She thrived.

As the starting point guard on Highland's varsity team, Soltys was entrusted to call plays and run the offense. While most middle schoolers would've been terrified of such a responsibility, Soltys excelled.

"She has a complete natural confidence in her abilities. She knows what she can do and is absolutely never afraid to show it," Highland basketball coach Diana Martinez said.

Soltys found similar success on the lacrosse field, where she started in her eighth-grade season.

"I usually have a rule that I don't put an eighth-grader in midfield be-



COURTESY PHOTO

A formidable sports fixture at Highland School since eighth grade, Abby Soltys helped the Hawks win three state titles in girls lacrosse and one in basketball. She'll play Division I women's lacrosse at Mercer University and is 2021 *Fauquier Times* Highland Girls Athlete of the Year.

cause you don't expect them to have the confidence. But halfway through the season I realized I was wasting her because she belonged there, she was that good and that confident," Highland girls lacrosse coach Kristen Conques said.

Soltys made her impression on the lacrosse team early in the year. At the first team practice, Conques put Soltys one-on-one in a ground ball drill against one of the team's toughest senior defenders. Soltys won, and while the senior was frustrated to be bested by Soltys, Conques remembers the girl pulling her aside after practice. "She said, 'I love this girl... I want to work with her,'" Conques said.

In the 2017 girls lacrosse state final against Cape Henry, Conques was deliberating how to stop their opponent's star forward.

See **SOLTYS**, page 26

Whoa, Angelo: Most recruited boys hoops star in county history goes from NoVa to Nova

By Jason S. Rufner

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

When scholarship offers from the biggest names in men's college basketball started to roll his way, Angelo Brizzi was as surprised as anyone.

"When I was a freshman, my goal was to play at a really smart D3 school, like Carnegie Mellon or MIT, someplace like that," said Brizzi, the 2021 *Fauquier Times* Highland School Boys Athlete of the Year.

Brizzi, a 6-foot-4 left-handed point guard with a deadly outside shot, eventually made Villanova University his selection. He racked up perhaps the most impressive collegiate offer list of any boys hoopster in Fauquier County history, and turned down offers from Michigan, Virginia, Arizona and a host of other top-tier programs.

Brizzi has lived in Fauquier since third grade, when his family relocated to Warrenton from Gainesville. He's been a dedicated athlete his entire young life, playing soccer, football, and baseball, and even swimming for the Warrenton-based Brookside Hurricanes of the Prince William Swim League until he was a high school sophomore.

"Swimming is my best natural sport," said Brizzi, whose best stroke was the butterfly. His mother Carolyn was a high school swimmer, and sister Camilla swam in college.

"I think swimming is great for your body," he said. "If I had done

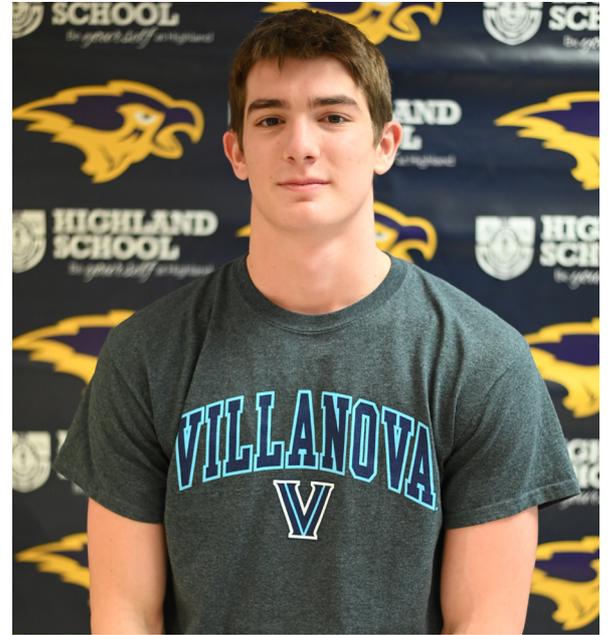


PHOTO BY DAVE HENRICKSON

Raised in a diehard basketball family, Angelo Brizzi's path led him to unprecedented success at Fauquier High, Highland School and the AAU circuit, making him Fauquier County's most heralded boys hoops recruit ever. The 6-foot-4 point guard will play at Villanova and is the 2021 *Fauquier Times* Highland Boys Athlete of the Year.

that full-time, I think I would've been a monster."

Brizzi also enjoyed playing soccer, baseball, and football as a kid. But he's had the most success on the hardwood. "Basketball was just the most fun for me. I was pretty good at it and I enjoyed working at it," Brizzi said. "It was something I could see myself going forward with."

Hoops dreams

A miniature hoop stood in the sunroom of the Brizzi home, inviting a toddling Angelo to learn the basics. And he did.

He kept learning as he entered the youth Gainesville Basketball Association, then the Warrenton Youth Sports Club after the Brizzis moved.

See **BRIZZI**, page 27

THE BRIZZI FILE

-Family: Father Pat is a retired teacher and former head basketball coach at then-Stonewall Jackson High School. Mother Carolyn is a human resources director for Northrup Grumman and was a high school swimmer. Sister Camilla, 25, swam for West Virginia Wesleyan. Sister Carissa, 23, played softball for the University of Connecticut.
-Hoops stats at Highland: 60 career games; 1,336 career points, 369 career assists.
-Nicknames: AB and Gelo.
-Favorite hoopsters: Steve Nash, Rajon Rondo, Jason Williams.

-Uniform numbers: 1 and 14.

-Favorite movie: "Saving Private Ryan."

-Favorite basketball movie: "Glory Road."

-Favorite vacation spot: Corolla, Outer Banks.

-Favorite sports drink flavor: Grape.

-Favorite video game: "Call of Duty."

-Education: Hasn't declared a major at Villanova, but is strong in math and sciences. Said he's interested in environmental sciences and graphic design. Brizzi had a 4.3 GPA at Highland and scored 1,410 on his SAT.

THE SOLTYS FILE

-Family: Mother Lesley is the Director of Financial Operations at Carfax. My dad George is the VP of Sales for Skillsoft. Sister Kayla, 19, was a Highland two-sport star and plays lacrosse at Mercer University. Younger sister Emma, 14, plays lacrosse as well.
-Favorite food: "Anything sweet, especially chocolate! I also love buffalo chicken dip."
-Favorite restaurant: "I love Cafe Torino in Warrenton! Best Italian food ever!"
-Number: "I wear number 4 for everything. I've always loved that

number and I have a really cool aunt who wore it too."

-Sports superstition: "I wear the same sports bra for every game each season. I'll go out before the first game of the season and buy a cool colored one and I can't play without it on."

-Favorite athlete: Grayson Allen, Milwaukee Bucks, formerly of Duke.

-Did you know? Abby is an ambassador for Morgan's Message, a non-profit named after former Kettle Run lacrosse star Morgan Rodgers that supports mental health awareness in schools and athletics.

HORSE BRIEFS

OLYMPIC SILVER FOR
UPPERVILLE'S ST. BRIDE'S FARM

David and Barbara Roux's Baloutinue was part of the silver-medal-winning show jumping squad last week in Tokyo. Rider Laura Kraut was joined by teammates Jessica Springsteen and McLain Ward for the narrow loss in a jump-off for gold with Sweden.

The Roux's St. Bride's Farm in Upperville has owned Baloutinue, an 11-year-old Hanoverian gelding by Balou de Rouet out of Landor S, since April. Middleburg rider Adam Prudent started Baloutinue's international career in 2019; the pair logging consistent results at the FEI 2- and 3-star levels, moving up to 5-star earlier this year. Kraut, who won Olympic gold in 2008 at Beijing, took over the ride when the gelding was sold to St. Bride's this spring.

At 55, Kraut became the oldest American woman to win an Olympic medal in history.

HUNT TRAIL RIDES LISTED

Many local hunts are planning August open trail rides and training events in preparation for the season that opens in September.

The Bull Run Hunt has a moonlight ride Aug. 21 at 6 p.m. from Highlands in Culpeper. bullrunhunt.com

Warrenton Hunt hosts two August rides – Aug. 15 is from Winfall Farm in Catlett, Aug. 29 from Elmwood in Catlett. Both rides begin at 8 a.m. with refreshments to follow. warrentonhunt.com

Old Dominion Hounds has two open schooling days at their hunter trial field in Orlean. Riders can practice over hunt fences from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., with a hunt professional on the grounds for assistance, if needed. Text master Debbie Welch for details: (540) 631-8607.

The Piedmont Foxhounds are hosting an open trail ride Aug. 14 from Peace and Plenty in Upperville. The guided, two-hour ride starts at 8 a.m.

SAVE THE DATE

The 122nd anniversary Warrenton Horse Show is Sept. 1 to 5 at the historic showgrounds on Shirley Avenue near old town Warrenton. Classes run all day, every day of the show, with night sessions on Thursday – a new jumper classic, Saturday – the Miller Toyota Hunter Classic, and Sunday – “hunt night.” Details are at warrentonhorseshow.com.



PHOTO BY BETSY BURKE PARKER

McLain Ward and Contagious were part of the U.S. show jumping team that won team silver at the Tokyo Olympics last week. Here, Ward and Contagious jump to victory at the 2019 Upperville Horse Show.

THOROUGHBRED YEARLING SHOW
AT WARRENTON SHOWGROUNDS SEPT. 8

Virginia-sired or certified yearlings will compete for \$35,000 in prizes at the 20th annual Virginia Breeders Fund yearling futurity Sept. 8 at the Warrenton Horse Show grounds. Admission is free. Find out more at vabred.org.

HORSE COURSES AT EMORY
AND HENRY COLLEGE

Emory and Henry College in southwest Virginia will offer a new bachelor of arts degree in Equine Assisted Therapy, starting this fall.

The therapy blends psychology and equine studies courses, designed to train students in human psychology and psychopathology and how horses may be used in order to improve mental health.

“This interdisciplinary program blends the college’s expertise in equine studies and psychology to create an opportunity for students who are interested in utilizing their knowledge and love of horses in order to offer therapeutic services to children and adults,” said Jessica Denniston,

assistant professor. “This major provides an excellent path for students interested in receiving graduate training in various mental health fields as well as allied fields such as occupational therapy.”

The program will be based on the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association model, recognized as the standard-setting organization in this field.

Visit www.ehc.edu/equinetherapy for details.

RECORD SEASON, SO FAR,
AT COLONIAL DOWNS

Colonial Downs kicked off its 2021 racing season last week with a record opening day handle of \$2.66 million, spurred by a four-pack of \$100,000 Virginia turf stakes and the return of fans to the New Kent track now in its third year under ownership of the Colonial Downs Group.

The season continues every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday through Sept. 1. More is at colonialdowns.com.

HOUND PERFORMANCE TRIALS SET THIS FALL

The Bull Run Hunt will host a foxhound performance trials Oct. 23, with Blue Ridge Hunt hosting on Oct. 24. Details are at bullrunhunt.com.

Brizzi never thought playing hoops at a D-1 school like Villanova was possible

BRIZZI, from page 25

Angelo had a good live-in teacher. Dad Pat was the head coach at then-Stonewall Jackson High School in Manassas for an 18-season run ending in 1998.

“He’s been the biggest influence along the way,” said Brizzi of his father. “My dad was big on making sure I had the skills to dribble and pass and shoot.”

Brizzi noted all the road trips to distant tournaments that he and his father made together over the years. “I owe almost everything to him,” he continued.

Brizzi advanced to middle school, where another family member helped his development even more. His uncle Wayne was the longtime head coach at Fauquier High School, concluding a 27-year tenure after last season.

“He let me practice with the high school team when I was in seventh grade,” Brizzi said. “That was the

“If I can cause one kid in the area to take up basketball, that’s enough. It’d be great to inspire some of the kids in the area.”

-- ANGELO BRIZZI

first time I went up against older guys, bigger bodies. There were days they’d kick my butt, but I had to find a way to hang. That was really important to me.”

By his freshman season, he was ready for high school ball. Brizzi, a natural left-hander, ran point for the Falcons, scoring nearly 500 points and dishing nearly 100 assists to earn second-team all-region honors in 2018.

Highland bound

For both academic and athletic reasons, Brizzi transferred two miles

away to private Highland for his sophomore year. The move became a boon for player and team both.

Over the next three seasons, Brizzi averaged 19.1 points, 5.3 assists, and 4.6 rebounds per game, while nailing 155 3-pointers. He finished with 1,336 career points.

“One of his most impressive accomplishments that shows his all-around game,” said Highland head coach Brian Hooker, “was the fact that he was our second-leading rebounder all three years while being a point guard.”

Those stats helped the Hawks achieve new heights in the Virginia Independent Schools Athletic Association. Highland went 64-11 over Brizzi’s three seasons, making it to the state tournament’s semifinals twice, and reaching the No. 2 ranking in both 2020 and 2021.

“Angelo was an extremely skilled high school basketball player,” Hooker said. “He is a scoring point guard who has tremendous shooting range

but also has great court vision.”

Brizzi’s junior year was a record-setting one for the Hawks. Despite just two returners on the roster, Highland went 28-3 and made the state semis for the first time ever. Brizzi rang up 20.3 points and 6.6 assists per contest, earning Most Valuable Player honors for the Delaney Athletic Conference.

“We should have won that game,” said Brizzi of that semifinal in 2020. “We lost it in the end [to Norfolk Collegiate], but we should have had a state title that year. But it was a great year, for both me and the team.”

Brizzi said it’s a point of pride that he helped Highland go further than it had ever gone before.

“I stayed at Highland because I wanted to take us to a final four and to a championship,” he said. “I didn’t get the ring, but doing something we’d never done before is a great memory.”

See BRIZZI, page 28

BRIZZI, from page 27

His senior season was diminished by the pandemic, limiting Highland to just 11 games, winning 10. Brizzi played in nine, scoring 21.6 points and 7.1 assists per game, repeating as league MVP and collecting his second VISAA first-team all-state pick.

Again the Hawks made states and advanced to the semis, but a positive COVID test forced Highland to forfeit and bow out of the tournament, leaving their final record at 10-2.

On the AAU circuit

In sixth grade, Brizzi joined the local Amateur Athletic Union program, the Fauquier Xplosion. He dominated the local kids for two years, then challenged himself by joining Team Loaded, a bigger AAU program based in Richmond.

“I thought I was pretty good, but that experience humbled me,” he said. “It was really bad at first. I got my butt kicked by kids my age. But I slowly figured things out and got better.”

As he got better, it began to dawn on Brizzi that college basketball might be possible. But he didn’t yet see himself at the highest level.

At the same time he transferred to Highland, Brizzi also switched AAU programs, landing with the Baltimore Basketball Club. For two summers, he traveled to Boston, Dallas, and other cities to compete against some of the best high school-age competition in the country. Usually, he was on the winning side.

“Those were probably my two most important summers where I developed the most. Two most fun summers as well,” he said. “Our team was really good both years. We just counted the losses. No idea how many wins we had.”

The Baltimore program folded, so Brizzi was invited to join Charlotte-based Team Curry, a program sponsored by NBA all-star Stephen Curry, for the summer of 2020. Despite being limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, he played in tournaments in South Carolina and Georgia.



PHOTO BY DAVE HENRICKSON

Besides his 1,336 points in three seasons at Highland, Angelo Brizzi carried a 4.3 GPA.

“That was still a good summer,” he said.

Pick of colleges

It was his first summer in Baltimore when Brizzi realized his sights could be set higher.

“George Washington University reached out to me and had me visit a couple of times,” he said. “That’s when I thought Division 1 might be possible. But I didn’t know I was Villanova-good until they offered me.”

Offers from Davidson, Northwestern, Dartmouth, Virginia Tech, Yale, Wake Forest, and doz-

ens of others came streaming in, 33 in total. Villanova, Brizzi said, was “the first big one to offer.”

That came in April of 2020. He committed to the Wildcats that July, and is now a full-fledged member of Jay Wright’s program.

“I had a bunch of low- and mid-major offers and I was more than happy with those, so everything else was just icing on the cake. I couldn’t have asked for more.”

Currently, Brizzi is getting used to being a college athlete. After spending June and July on campus for workouts and classes, one difference stands out.

“I knew the physicality was going to be tough, but it still caught me off guard,” he said. “Every day is a battle, bodies banging against each other. Everybody’s strong and knows how to be physical. That’s a big jump. I’m still adjusting to it. But I’d say I’m integrated to the point where I’m just learning the specifics of Villanova basketball.”

Brizzi’s goals for his freshman season is to get physically stronger and to continue to learn finer points.

“We already have some really good guards, and I’m a nobody compared to them, so it’s about learning as much as possible. Be a sponge,” he said. “I just want to be part of a great team and contribute however I can.”

Representing Fauquier

Given the availability of major college basketball on TV, Brizzi could be seen frequently and bring glory to Warrenton.

“It definitely means something, because nobody else [from Fauquier] has been in this position since Jerrelle Benimon, and that was 12 years ago,” Brizzi said. Benimon graduated from Fauquier in 2009 and played at Georgetown and Towson (making the NBA briefly) before playing professionally overseas.

“But if I can cause one kid in the area to take up basketball, that’s enough,” Brizzi said. “It’d be great to inspire some of the kids in the area.”



Words matter.